

## **CHAPTER 11**

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Packing and unpacking are a constant part of Foreign Service life. Preparation can help make the process much easier. Begin by reading the Transportation publication *It's Your Move* (available from Transportation in Room 1248, Main State, (202) 647-4140 or (800) 424-2947—only outside the Washington, DC, area). In addition, WebMove is an easy-to-use web-based tool that walks you through the entire packout process. WebMove provides you with valuable information such as a glossary of transportation-specific terminology, reference documents, forms, and other helpful resources. See <http://webmove.a.state.gov/default.htm>.

## **HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS**

### **Types of Shipments**

You will be packing two kinds of shipments:

- 1) Your household effects (HHE), which will be handled by a moving and storage company and sent overseas or put into storage; and
- 2) Your unaccompanied air baggage (UAB), also referred to as "air freight," which will also be packed by a packing company but will go by air.

The Department of State regulations define baggage as "official and personal property needed for use en route or immediately upon arrival at destination." It includes accompanying air baggage and UAB.

The household effects shipment includes everything you need for your tour of duty that has not been included in your accompanying air baggage or UAB. Your vehicle will be shipped separately. HHE are household belongings that will be sent in a liftvan by sea freight, surface, or even air.

Foreign Service posts vary greatly. A few require that you bring your own furniture and appliances. Most supply furniture and appliances and require only that you bring a limited shipment of housewares, linens, and those items that will make you feel at home. Post reports indicate what type of housing the U.S. Government provides and what household items might be available on the local market. Some posts not only allow for the shipping of HHE, but also additional consumables such as specific food items, paper products, toiletries, and other products not available at post. For specific information on household effects and consumables, review the briefing boxes at the Overseas Briefing Center and consult the post Community Liaison Office (CLO) Coordinator or administrative section.

### **Weight Allowance for Shipment of Household Effects**

The full weight allowance for shipment of household effects is 18,000 pounds. When furnished quarters will not be provided at post, a full shipment of 18,000 pounds is authorized. When furnished quarters are provided, a limited shipment of 7,200 pounds is authorized. Ambassadors may send a limited shipment of 12,000 pounds, of which 1,000 may be sent by air in addition to the standard UAB allowance.

The weight of cartons, crates, and other packing materials is charged against the weight allowance; the weight of liftvans is not. Storage at government expense is authorized for the HHE that are not shipped (within the overall weight allowance). The total of the weight of shipment plus the weight of effects stored may not exceed the total HHE allowance.

The shipment authorization remains valid for one year from the date of the employee's arrival at post. The Chief of the Transportation Division is authorized to deny use of U.S. Government services and facilities when requests are made for more than two supplemental shipments or multiple requests are made for pick-ups of HHE from locations other than the employee's residence.

An overweight shipment will not be shipped until the employee has paid the excess freight charges (which may be deductible from income tax). Consider scheduling a few days between packing out and departure to make arrangements should your shipment be overweight.

A separate weight allowance is authorized for UAB. Any unused UAB weight allowance may be applied to increase the surface shipment or storage of household effects. UAB should be packed and weighed before the surface shipment so that adjustments can be made easily. The weight of all packing materials, crates, and banding is charged against the UAB allowance. Often the final wrapping takes place after the cartons have been taken from your home, so check with the packing company in order to allow for the additional weight.

### **Ways to Ship Household Effects**

In moving HHE from the United States to Foreign Service posts, the Department uses the following methods:

1. The conventional pack-and-crate method and
2. International Through Government Bill of Lading (ITGBL) method

Under the conventional pack-and-crate method, a company that is under contract with the Department packs your effects at your house, picks them up, and prepares them for export shipment. When packing is completed, your HHE is brought to the packer's warehouse and from there to the nearest port. There they are loaded on the first available U.S. flagship scheduled to call at the overseas port used by your new post for its inbound shipments. The post arranges for customs clearance, delivery, and unpacking. This method is used for many posts.

In November 1992, the Department began to ship employee household effects via the International Through Government Bill of Lading (ITGBL) method to some posts. Under this mechanism, an international freight forwarder handles shipments to given posts from origin to destination through agreements it has with packing companies, port handling companies, and steamship companies. With the ITGBL method, the employee will work with two contractors, one firm to handle the air freight and storage, and one company to pack and remove the HHE for overseas shipping. The international forwarder arranges to have the shipment trucked to port, booked and loaded aboard ship, cleared through customs at destination, and delivered and unpacked at your new home.

## **Shipping Documents**

A Government Bill of Lading (GBL) is a contract between the government and a transportation company for the performance of certain transportation services. It is a receipt for effects turned over to the company at origin and a receipt for their delivery. It is used for rail, highway, air, and occasionally for sea shipments. It also serves as a:

1. shipping order,
2. carrier's waybill, and
3. notice of loss or damage.

Packer's Authorizations are approvals by the Department for a packing and storage company to:

1. Pick up your HHE and prepare them for shipment,
2. place goods you will not need in storage,
3. withdraw goods from storage and deliver them to your house, and
4. give you access to your stored goods so that you can remove certain items.

The Transportation Operations Office issues Packer's Authorizations after a packing company has been selected and the Department has assigned you a packer. Packer's Authorizations will not be issued until you have selected dates and confirmed the dates of your move with the Transportation Operations Office.

## **Personal Inventory**

Begin the packing process by making a personal inventory of all your possessions. There are a number of tools you can use to do this.

1. Video Recorder  
One of the simplest ways to complete an inventory is to use your video camera, if you have one. Go through each room of your house recording the contents, opening closets, cupboards, and drawers (you may need help). Describe everything, giving brand names, the approximate age or purchase date, and other details.

Once you have finished, make a list of any serial numbers you need, collect warranties, sales receipts, appraisals, and other paperwork, and make a copy of both the videotape and the accompanying papers to store in a safe deposit box or with a friend or relative.

2. Camera  
Again, go through your house taking photographs that clearly show all of your possessions. This will require many shots of each room, showing the contents of all closets, cupboards, drawers, and so on.

Once the photos are developed (with double prints, of course), write additional notes on the back regarding brand, approximate age or purchase date, and any special considerations.

As above, collect receipts, warranties, appraisals, etc. and make a double package, one to carry with you and one to store someplace safe.

- **Computer Software**  
There are many household inventory programs available, many of which can be downloaded from the Internet and some of which are free. For more information, contact the OBC at [FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov). More or updated choices can be found if you use your favorite search engine (try the words "household inventory software" without the quotes).

Once you have completed your inventory, back up your work in some way (floppy disk, CD, online backup service), put your paperwork together, and store as above.

3. **Paper and pencil**  
Write your name(s) and the date on a cover page. Go through your house, room by room, and write down everything you see. Group and record items by category unless they have special features or exceptional value. Attach receipts, appraisals, etc., and copy the whole package.

Regardless of which inventory method you use, keep pictures of household effects, especially valuables, and make sure you have all receipts, appraisals, or estimates of the value of items, in case of loss or damage. Fax or mail a complete inventory to the Claims Office (see below), indicating which items on the list are of high value (\$1,000 or more), or hand in a limited list of the high-value items only. Doing this establishes the ownership and value of these items in case you ever need to file a claim. You may want to attach this to the DS 1620 so you will be sure to provide the personal information requested, such as agency, grade, Social Security number, and so on. This form is available on Infoforms, from the Claims Office, or at post. Please note that the packing company never sees your list of high-value items; it goes only to Claims.

Once your inventory is complete, you can plan how you will separate items: 1) packed in your suitcase, 2) sent by surface (HHE), 3) sent by air freight (UAB), or 4) put in storage.

### **Assignment of Packers**

Transportation Counselors will answer your questions and help you make the necessary arrangements. Travelers should visit or contact the Department's Transportation Office (Room 1248, Main State, (202)-647-4140, or (800) 424-2947—only outside the Washington, DC, area) as soon as moving dates are known. (Pack-out dates can be selected without travel orders, but actual packing cannot start). At that time, the employee will inform the Transportation Counselor of his/her moving and storage requirements, the approximate amount of the effects to be shipped and/or stored (your inventory should help with this), and the preferred pack-out dates. Provide at least two available dates to give the counselor flexibility in scheduling your move. The Counselor will then select a packing company, assign a packer to handle the move, and schedule the move with the selected contractor. When the move is scheduled, the packer will contact the employee to reconfirm the pack-out dates. If, at a later date, the employee needs to change the pack-out dates, the employee *must contact the Travel Counselor early*, in order to reschedule the move. The best dates for you and your family should be established *early*, before the packing company is assigned. *Cancellation may result in no date at all if the movers are already booked.*

If you live outside the Washington, DC, area, Transportation Operations will furnish you with specific information on the packing procedure to be followed. Department of State and AID employees may call toll-free for assistance at (800) 424-2947.

### **Pre-pack Survey**

The next task is to make an appointment with the representative of the packing and storage company assigned to you by the Transportation Division and to get an estimate of your shipment's weight. You do not need travel orders to reserve packing dates, although you must have them by the time packing occurs. The signed pre-pack estimate will enable you to eliminate items necessary to keep within your shipment or storage allowance or, if underweight, to give you a chance to include additional items in your shipment.

It is your responsibility to arrange the pre-pack survey with the assigned company. Be certain the estimator knows of and includes all items stored in your garage or attic, as well as items to be purchased. Although experienced company estimators are generally within 10 percent of the actual weight, the estimate is not binding, and all charges will be based on actual weights, not on the estimated weight. At the time of the survey, also discuss any items that might need special handling. Authorization for controlled storage must be included in the travel orders. Such authorization is obtainable from the employee's Personnel Technician in Room 2808.

To protect yourself against an overweight shipment, advise the packing company that it may not ship or store any weight in excess of your allowances without your written consent.

### **Before the Packers Arrive**

Before the packers arrive, consider doing the following:

- Sort out items for shipping and storage. Do not ship anything you could not bear to lose, should you have to leave post in an evacuation. Also consider that HHE is sometimes subjected to climatic extremes and rough handling.
- Dismantle outdoor play equipment and stereo and television sets. Repack in original cartons, if you saved them.
- Take down electrical fixtures that are to be packed.
- Remove pictures and mirrors from walls and group together.
- Take up wall-to-wall carpeting, if necessary. (Packers will not do this.)
- Consider having your area rugs cleaned before placing them in long-term storage or shipping them overseas.
- Separate, tag with different colored stickers, or otherwise identify "household goods" surface shipment, "air freight" shipment, and "storage" lot. Indicate the destination of drawer contents on outside of drawer.
- To the extent possible, divide items to be packed into "Fragile" and "Heavy" groups. Packers usually start with fragile items and need to have a space to pack, such as the dining room table. Fragile items can be collected on the table and, as they are packed, new items can be brought until all art objects, china, crystal, etc. have been wrapped. (Each lampshade should be packed in its own carton).
- Place kitchen utensils on the counters or on the kitchen table.

Some people prefer to pack unbreakable items such as clothing, linens, and personal papers themselves to get them out of the way before the packers arrive. Sealed owner-packed cartons will be listed on the moving company's inventory as packed by owner (PBO), and the carrier will disclaim any responsibility for loss or damage. Similarly, any claim against the U.S. Government for loss or damage of PBO goods will be disallowed. *Only* privately purchased insurance will provide protection for lost or damaged goods that were packed by the owner. On the other hand, if an owner has packed goods and the packers inspect the contents, they will then seal the carton and accept responsibility for it. Some packers refuse to ship PBO material. If you plan to do self-packing, confirm agreement with the packers prior to moving date. The moving company can furnish appropriate cartons, tape, and labels in advance if you wish to pack some items yourself.

Personally pack small, high-value items such as cameras, watches, and jewelry and include them in your accompanying baggage.

Packers are supposed to bring a scale for weighing air freight as it is packed. In case they fail to bring a scale, try to have a bathroom scale handy. Allow an extra 10-12 pounds per box for wrapping and banding, which will be done later. Because of the impossibility of keeping mobile scales calibrated, their weights can only be considered an estimate. The employee should arrange to telephone the packer the day after pack-out to check the final weight. On the day of packing, ask whether waterproof cartons will be used. The liftvans themselves should also be waterproofed.

### **When the Packers Arrive**

For best results, it is essential for you to plan on being present during the entire pack-out. The person who has organized the pack-out is always best able to answer the packers' questions. When the packers arrive, take them around your entire dwelling to indicate what needs to be packed. Marking all items with color-coded labels (e.g., green for HHE, red for storage, or blue for air freight, etc.) and somewhat grouping items according to destination helps immeasurably to reduce packing mistakes. It is preferable to pack air freight first; that way you can add or subtract items according to weight (this is impossible if everything else is already packed). Next, pack surface freight, and finally the storage items. You may arrange to have all of these packed on separate days.

In order to better supervise the packers during pack-out, try to enlist the help of friends or family. Especially if several packers come at once, it is very difficult for one person to supervise them all.

The packers will place a number on each item or carton and list it on their inventory sheets; for example: #1-linens, #2-china, and #3-kitchen supplies. You may also wish to use your own marking system to number each carton as it is filled and sealed. In a notebook, record a brief description of the contents, which makes it easier to locate specific items upon arrival at post. If any cartons are lost, it is then possible to determine quickly what is missing.

Be certain that every container or loose item has the packer's inventory tag or tape on it and that each item is listed legibly on all inventory copies. (The packer's inventory will not be as detailed as the ones you made earlier). The contents of cases, such as a violin case, should be listed separately on the inventory.

The packers should specially crate mirrors, paintings, and similar items that are easily damaged or broken. Dishes and glassware should be packed vertically with horizontal layers of cardboard between layers of china and glassware to minimize breakage risks.

Notations on the condition of your furniture—nicks, scratches, worn places—will be entered on the inventory. You should make sure that a proper description of the condition of your goods is entered. Note any exceptions you may have to the condition descriptions on the inventory next to the item number.

Usually liftvans (huge crates of wood used for sea shipment) are loaded at your doorstep. Watch how they are packed. Make certain that those cartons designated for storage are separated from those to be shipped. Mark those specific cartons containing items you may wish to locate easily. Be sure items are protected from each other with the heaviest items at the bottom. Generally, packers do a meticulous job, but should you have to give instructions, remember that everything should be packed so solidly that nothing can move even a fraction of an inch. Do not hesitate to telephone the Transportation Inspector [(202) 647-4140] should questions or problems arise during pack-out in the United States.

On occasion, moving companies prefer to take your cartons and crates to their warehouse for packing into liftvans. Under no circumstances should this happen unless it has been previously cleared with a Transportation Counselor, before the company leaves your home. Taking loose cartons and items to the warehouse for packing increases the chances for loss and confusion.

When the packers have finished, you will sign their inventories for goods in shipment and in storage. These are the only receipts you have for your goods. Take part in seeing that they are accurate. The inventory includes notation of the condition of separate pieces, but contents of cartons are not listed in detail. Especially for items of high value, be sure the description is adequate and the value noted. *Hand carry copies of the inventories with you to post*, and leave copies in a safe accessible place in the United States. You will need the inventory when your shipment is delivered, when you receive your stored effects, and if you need to make a claim. You must refer to the inventory of stored goods when you request an additional shipment to post of items from storage. If you should need to retrieve items from storage before access or delivery at government expense is authorized, the inventory can save you time and money. Any personal inventory cannot serve as a substitute for the inventories you receive from the packers.

### **Storage in the United States**

When cartons are stored in the United States, the storage company will number each box. It is important for you to know exactly what each carton contains since you might want to request some of the cartons for a later shipment. The request for cartons must be made by number. Individual items will not be retrieved from boxes. It is also essential that this information be recorded if, for some reason, you may wish to go into storage for items at your own expense. All arrangements for gaining access to goods in storage must be made in writing to the Transportation Operations Office. The storage company cannot grant access without authorization by the Department. In order to gain access to goods in storage, it is important for couples to draft a joint property statement, in a similar format to the one appearing at the end of this chapter. The statement needs to be signed by both parties and notarized. An e-mailed or faxed permission to have access may be used in lieu of the formal property statement.



Government-paid access to stored goods is allowed only during a transfer between overseas posts or if Separate Maintenance Allowance for family is in effect. At all other times (including evacuation, home leave with return to post, and vacation travel), access is at the employee's expense. Retrieval of goods from storage in situations of divorce is especially complex, as is shipment of goods from post to a divorcing spouse. Seek advice from the administrative office at post or from the Family Liaison Office (e-mail [flo@state.gov](mailto:flo@state.gov)).

A retiree has one year from the last date in pay status to arrange for the delivery of goods from storage or shipment from post in some situations. Consult the Retirement Division for further information (<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/ret/contact/>).

In the case of the death of an employee overseas, storage of goods at government expense continues for three months. After that, the family member must accept the goods or assume storage expenses. HHE are shipped to any point in the United States designated by the next of kin within 12 months of the date of death.

### **Unpacking at Your Destination**

When your HHE are unloaded, check off the number of each carton or loose item listed on your copy of the packer's inventory. Any missing or damaged items should be noted on the movers' inventory prior to signing it. You are entitled to have the movers unpack all your effects. However, you may wish to do some of your own unpacking later in order to know where things are stored. In that case, note in writing at the bottom of the inventory sheet that *the condition at the time of delivery is unknown*.

As you unpack abroad, ask whether you should save cartons for the journey home. Cardboard products might be at a premium at your post and you may be glad you untaped, flattened, and stored an assortment of boxes. Boxes for electronic equipment are especially good to keep for future moves.

### **SOME SUGGESTED DOs AND DON'Ts**

#### **DOs**

- Read the information on allowances provided by the Transportation Operations Office and in the post report. Be sure to read *It's Your Move*.
- Plan your departure with enough flexibility to allow for possible failure by packers to meet the scheduled time exactly.
- Order new furniture and/or appliances that will be included in your shipment far enough in advance to be delivered to your home for pick-up with your other HHE. If new items are delivered to the warehouse for packing, you may not be able to determine whether they arrived in perfect condition. If new items are being sent to the packers after they have picked up your effects, you must furnish to them—in writing—a list of items ordered and the names and addresses of the vendors. Packing firms will not delay packing the goods on hand for shipment, even though all the ordered items have not been received at the warehouse. Items received late will be packed as separate shipments.

- Visit the Transportation Office as soon as you know your preferred moving date so that a Traveler Counselor can select a packing company and schedule your move. Appointments can be scheduled with packers before you have your travel orders. Consider packing air freight, surface shipment, and storage on separate days.
- Be sure the packer provides you with a complete and descriptive inventory showing the correct number of items stored and shipped.
- Be sure that agreements between you and the packing company are *in writing*. Confirm all transactions with the Transportation Office.
- Advise the Transportation Operations Office of your travel plans and a telephone number and/or address where you can be reached prior to or en route to your destination. It is the traveler's responsibility to stay in touch with Transportation.
- Check with the Transportation Operations Office regarding controlled storage for valuable or irreplaceable items such as furs, tapestries, paintings, and rugs. Controlled storage must be written in your Travel Authorization by the employee's Personnel Technician, Room 2808.
- Make certain you have adequate private insurance on your shipment and stored items for damage, loss, and replacement value.
- When you receive your effects at *your* post, note on the inventory or delivery receipt provided by the mover all exceptions as to loss or damage. If you do not have time to open all cartons, sign the receipt by adding the proviso: "*subject to further inspection.*"
- Promptly file a written claim with the moving company for any losses or damaged items. Under ordinary circumstances, if it turns you down—which it often does—you then apply to your own private insurance. If you do not have insurance, you can then file a claim against the U.S. Government (see Chapter 6, "Insurance").

## **DON'Ts**

- Do not put valuable items, such as silverware, heirlooms, furs, jewelry, and important documents and papers, in storage with the rest of your effects. They are best protected in a safe deposit box, bank vault, or moving company vault.

Controlled storage may be authorized for clothing, rugs, tapestries, paintings, other works of art, and other non-furniture items of high value. Furniture is not authorized controlled storage. High-value items include non-furniture items which: have value exceeding \$1,500; are part of a set whose combined pieces exceed a value of \$1,500; are one-of-a-kind articles that are irreplaceable and have a substantial, albeit hard-to-determine monetary or insurable value; and have special storage requirements. Notwithstanding the \$1,500 limit, controlled storage may be authorized for usable (in working condition) firearms. For more information on the availability of controlled storage, talk with the Transportation Office.

- Do not leave money or other valuables unprotected during the packing process.
- Do not offer alcoholic drinks to packing company employees. You may want to have non-alcoholic refreshments available, hoping that special attention paid to the movers will result in a positive attitude and more productivity.
- Do not neglect to promptly file a written claim to the moving company, after careful inspection, for any losses or damaged items. (Refer to "Do" list, above).

## **SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR HOUSEHOLD SHIPMENT**

Items that you will need will vary from post to post. The most important step in successfully packing just the right things is *research*. Visit or e-mail the Overseas Briefing Center ([FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov)) and find out as much as you can about your future home. Ask more than one person at post about what to bring. Do not assume that the first person you hear from has actually paid close attention to the size of the beds or whether vacuum cleaners are provided. Opinions will vary, so be sure to ask for the reasons behind people's suggestions.

Following are some general points to consider, based on the experiences of other Foreign Service families.

1. Furniture: Ask for a list of which furnishings will be provided, if any. If you are going to a furnished post, you may have to keep all of the government furnishings in your home even if you bring some of your own. Be sure to ask about storage space before deciding which larger items to take. Items that are seldom, if ever, provided: computer desks, child-sized furniture, and enough bookshelves for the typical Foreign Service family. Standing lamps and occasional tables are also useful to bring.
2. Decorative items: Bring anything that makes a new place home. However, remember that you will probably be picking up all kinds of wonderful new items. If you are not flexible about colors and décor, bring sofa covers or textiles to place over embassy furniture (true life examples: green silk sofa, rain forest print, pastels, terra cotta).
3. Do not bring anything that you absolutely cannot bear to lose; remember that things can get lost or damaged in storage, too.
4. Books: Books are wonderful to have, but heavy. Find out if there is a good English-language library or book exchange at post. Make sure that special books are packed carefully.
5. A key question is whether you can receive packages at post via APO or pouch. If so, you will be able to make purchases from online and mail order catalogs. That makes it less essential to try to pack everything you will need. Remember, however, that if you will be in the Southern Hemisphere, U.S. companies may have difficulty filling out-of-season orders (bathing suits in December or sweaters in July).

6. Think about when you will be visiting the United States or when you will have visitors. You may be able to shop then or ask friends to bring a few extra items.
7. Ask about heating and cooling at post: what exists, when is it turned on, and whether it functions if the power supply is erratic. You may appreciate an extra space heater or fan(s).
8. See Chapter 10, "Electricity Abroad," for ideas on what to bring when moving to a country with a different electrical system.
9. Clothing: Make sure that actual temperatures at post match your expectations (for instance, Mexico City can be very cold, but some people do not bring warm clothing because they imagine that they will not need it.) Check whether shoes in your size are available locally. It is hard to buy children's clothing in advance, because you never know how much they will grow. Try to make other arrangements (see 5 and 6 above). It is also hard to know what to bring in the way of women's clothing since fashions vary greatly from post to post. Find out as much as you can in advance or wait and see and buy later. Some people suggest packing winter clothing, even if you are going to a tropical post, since you may end up traveling during the winter.
10. Computers: Hand carry a laptop if it is important for you to have a computer immediately. Find out if electronics are cheaper or more expensive at post before purchasing anything new. Bring printer, scanner, paper, supplies, anything else not available at post.
11. Cosmetics: Do not stock up too much. Large supplies can end up going out of fashion or out of date. Take just enough to last until your next trip or the arrival of your next visitor. Do find out which items are not available locally (cotton balls, unscented soap, hypoallergenic products, etc.)
12. Gifts and seasonal decor: Ask when (and what kind of) hostess gifts are expected and if there are special items you should bring (expensive or hard to find at post). You may want a supply of presents for children's parties and special occasions, but remember that tastes change quickly. It is hard to gauge the exact need for these kinds of things. You may also wish to include items for Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, and Valentine's Day, for example.
13. Kitchen: Find out what foods are available at post and bring whatever cooking supplies you need. Ask if there are special items that are particularly useful (large pot for boiling water, flat rubber sink stoppers, ice cube trays, etc.)
14. Hobbies: If you quilt, sew, or do crafts, be sure to ask what supplies are available locally. You may want to stock up on fabrics, notions, etc.
15. Vacuum cleaners: Some posts offer these, some do not. In some cases, if the post vacuum breaks, it will not be fixed or replaced. Is a vacuum even needed? (In some countries the floors are all tile.) A "stick" vacuum is lightweight and easy to pack, but it may not do as good a job.

16. If anyone in your family has special dietary needs or preferences, plan ahead. Items such as unbleached flour, canned soups without MSG, or many favorite American products may not be available. It may be worth using a little of your shipment weight on some of these foods, even if you are not going to a consumables post.
17. Pet supplies: Check on the availability and cost of these, especially if you have a "picky" pet.
18. Miscellaneous: some people suggest bringing wastebaskets, on the theory that you can never have too many. On the other hand, there is probably something at post that would do. Find out if you need: extra telephones (and, if so, if you will need special adapters to plug them in); shower curtains and hooks (plus rods if needed); bathroom hooks or organizers; extra lamps or occasional tables. Also bring lots of clothes hangers and whatever linens you normally use—having verified, of course, the size of your new beds.
19. Cleaning products: If you think you might hire household help, you may want to stick with local products, since your staff will know how to use them. Bring anything needed for special items such as non-stick pans.

Other suggested items (adapt according to your interests and preferences):

- Automobile parts and supplies
- Bicycles
- Camping and picnic gear (cooler, grill—especially if you like a certain kind of grill)
- Candles (birthday cake and decorative)
- Card table and chairs (may be available from the embassy if only needed occasionally)
- China /dishes/glassware/silverware
- Christmas decorations (perhaps even an artificial tree. Find out what will be available locally).
- Flashlights, batteries, rechargeable lamps
- Flower vases and any flower-arranging supplies you use
- Freezer wrap and bags (an upright freezer is often provided at post, and you may want to stock up on and freeze items unavailable year-round.)
- Household tools that you regularly use (power tools are not generally needed), nails, screws, picture-hanging supplies, extension cords, any electrical supplies (see Chapter 10, "Electricity Abroad")
- Paper products (Again, ask what is available locally. You may want decorative paper napkins or paper plates if you use them, gift wrap, cards, transparent tape if you want U.S. quality, envelopes if you need a certain size, such as #10 business envelopes, post-it notes, other office supplies). If you are heading to the tropics, stick strips of waxed paper in the envelope flaps so they will not stick together. If you do not have time for this, some people swear by putting them in the freezer after unpacking.
- Photo albums You also may want to have copies made of irreplaceable pictures, such as historic family photos, and leave the originals someplace safe.
- Sports equipment and supplies (tennis balls, golf balls)

## **BAGGAGE**

There are two ways to ship your personal (as opposed to household) effects (HHE): 1) as accompanied air baggage or 2) as unaccompanied air freight (UAB).

## **Accompanied Air Baggage**

### **Weight Allowance**

The amount of baggage allowed to passengers without charge varies by airline according to class of service, ownership (American/foreign), and departure location. Pets are not included in your baggage allowance.

A traveler leaving the United States on an American flag carrier (AFC) is entitled to take two pieces of luggage each weighing a maximum of 70 pounds (31.8 kilos) for a maximum of 140 pounds. If the traveler flies all the way to his/her destination on the AFC, there is no problem. If the traveler changes to a foreign flag carrier (FFC) en route, and the luggage is "interlined" (i.e., *not* weighed before being put on the FFC), there is likewise no problem. However, if the luggage is weighed before being placed on the FFC, then the traveler may have to pay overweight charges on 96 pounds. The economy class weight allowance on most FFCs is only 44 pounds, and the traveler brought 140 pounds from the United States. Any overweight charges on the outbound trip may be reimbursed through the travel voucher process at post for excess baggage up to 96 pounds.

When travel begins on an FFC overseas, the traveler may take the local checked baggage weight for first-class passengers even when traveling on an economy class ticket. On most FFCs, the first-class baggage weight allowance is usually 66 pounds. Since the traveler has an economy class ticket (44 pounds permitted), a government excess baggage allowance ticket (GEBAT) will be issued to bring the weight allowance up to 66 pounds. Please note that the GEBAT is being phased out. It is never used in the United States and only sometimes overseas. If the traveler has to pay to bring the allowance up to 66 pounds, he/she will be reimbursed through submitting the travel voucher. In addition to the checked baggage allowance described above, passengers are also entitled to one piece of carry-on luggage. For additional information on baggage allowances, check with the Office of Transportation.

### **Content of Accompanied Air Baggage**

The accompanied suitcases are what you will have with you during your trip to *your* post, and the contents may be the only possessions you will have for several weeks or more.

- Determine your itinerary and whether you will have a chance to do laundry en route.
- Pack everything snugly, being sure that breakable items are fully cushioned by soft items. Leave no empty spaces and use underwear, socks, and so forth for cushioning. Consider using "deflators"—which compact garments to take much less space.
- Include a family medical kit. (See Chapter 5, "Medical Information and Issues.")

- Measure your suitcases to determine the length, width, and girth of each. If weight is also a factor in your travels, weigh your suitcases on bathroom scales to get an estimate.
- Stop when you are just short of the maximum weight limit and consider whether you need to allow for purchases en route.
- Pack your accompanying air baggage so that you do not have to open every bag at every stop. If possible, pack in such a way that one bag will suffice for the whole family during stopovers.
- Remember that every member of your family is allowed to carry certain items as cabin luggage. Be sure that everything needed for the flight is carried in the flight bag. This is also a good place to carry perfumes, cosmetics, nail polish, and other liquids that might be damaged by freezing or low air pressure. You should also carry your important papers in a briefcase or even a small suitcase as a "traveling desk."
- Your flight bag is sometimes weighed with your luggage and always passes through security inspection prior to takeoff.
- If you use old luggage, be sure that it will stand the trip. If fastenings are weak, put some kind of extra belt around the bag, such as the web-belts found at luggage and surplus stores. If you buy new luggage, buy lightweight, durable pieces.
- Tag each piece on the outside and tape a paper with your name and destination inside. It is helpful to mark luggage for easy identification with some distinctive color or symbol, such as a large square of plastic tape or colorful heavy yarn tied at the handle beside the luggage tags. Use luggage tags to indicate your flight itinerary and to provide telephone contact numbers in the case of loss or delay.
- Be certain that all luggage locks are in working order and that each piece has more than one key. It is a good idea to have a second family member carry the extra set of keys.

### **Suggested Items for Accompanied Air Baggage**

Ask your sponsor what will be in your housing when you arrive. Someone may be purchasing basic food supplies. You may want to ask for specific items if there is something very important to you (e.g., coffee).

Verify the contents and availability of post welcome kits. What does the kit contain? Ask for an honest opinion of the quality (some people complain about cheap sheets and towels). Are there enough welcome kits to go around if it is a busy time of year? Also, when will you need to return the kit? If you have to return it when your air freight arrives, make sure that you carry basic household items or send them in UAB.

Suggested items for carry-on luggage (See Chapter 15, "Children in the Foreign Service," for suggestions when traveling with kids):

- Laptop computer, if you have one
- Important documents (*Do not check these*) (an accordion file may be useful for keeping these organized)—include photos if these are very important to you
- Mini first aid kit/medical kit

- Water (drinking fountains are not common in many countries, and airplanes are very dry)
- Snacks (food may not arrive when needed)
- Sweaters/slippers/neck pillows/whatever will make you more comfortable for airline travel
- Towelettes/wet wipes (to clean hands, spills, etc.) and/or water-free hand sanitizer
- Basic toiletries (may want to obtain travel soap that is useful for hand washing clothing and dishes as well as people)
- At least one change of clothing for everyone (nothing is worse than having to travel in wet/dirty clothes)
- Plastic bags (for wet, dirty clothes, trash, etc.)
- Anything you need for layovers
- Address book/handheld organizer
- Books, stationery, whatever you want to do in flight
- Digital camera (if you own one—this will let you keep in touch with home immediately)/other camera/video camera

Suggested items to pack:

- Clothes: Remember that your UAB may be delayed. Make sure you have one or two outfits for dressy functions, work clothes, comfy clothes for relaxing or sports activities, maybe even a few items for the next season if it is possible that you may need them
- Photos
- Pet food (if animal needs particular brand)
- Swiss army knife or Leatherman all-in-one tool (not allowed in hand luggage)
- Small toolbox with basic tools for hanging pictures, doing small repairs
- Basic office supplies for home: transparent tape, masking tape, mini stapler, pens, pencils, notebook, scissors, mini pencil sharpeners
- Calculator
- Playing cards or other small games
- CD player and CDs or a small radio or cassette tape player
- Stamps (ask if needed—you may be able to get these at APO. If postal facilities are poor, you may want these to send letters back with other travelers for quicker delivery.)
- stationery
- adapter plugs, if needed right away (see Chapter 10, "Electricity Abroad," for advice on how to determine what to buy in advance)
- Bottle/can opener and any essential kitchen items not provided in welcome kit
- Clothes hangers (check how many will be in the welcome kit)
- Flashlight with new batteries
- Needles, thread, few buttons, snaps, hooks and eyes, safety pins
- Laundry bags, if you use them
- Rain gear, umbrella (if likely to be needed)
- Travel alarm clock with new batteries
- Anything else that will make you feel more comfortable and at home in an empty, unfamiliar place: "fun" or decorative items.
- (Lightweight) projects for accompanying family members if you will spend time "in limbo," e.g., photos albums to organize, books you have meant to read, language learning aids, or other things that will give you a feeling of accomplishment while waiting for UAB and HHE to arrive.



## Unaccompanied Air Freight

The purpose of sending a portion of your household effects by air freight is to enable you to set up light housekeeping at once. Again, verify details regarding welcome kits; find out what will be provided and how long you can keep it.

Also check with post for a realistic estimate on how long air freight should take; it usually arrives within three to four weeks of pack-out. Since your HHE may take as long as two to five months (in very exceptional cases) to arrive, take stock of your family needs and interests and pack the air freight accordingly. Find out if you will spend time in temporary quarters: you may not want to unpack your UAB just to pack it up again.

Remember that even your UAB may be delayed, so do not absolutely count on its prompt arrival. If you really need something, take it with you. Ask if there are items that people at post typically lend to one another during the arrival process (e.g., toys, videos, kitchen utensils).

Have air freight packed before household effects so excess weight can be removed and sent with HHE. Keep in mind the high risk of breakage of china and glassware sent by air; packing these in the original factory cartons may help. Consider purchasing attractive plastic dishes and glasses that can be used for picnics later. Ship small appliances in their original cartons if available.

When arranging for the shipment of air freight, you might stress the need for waterproofing the cartons, especially if it is rainy season at your new post. Packers are supposed to bring a scale to estimate UAB weight. However, in case they fail to do so, make arrangements to have a bathroom scale available: exceeding the air freight weight allowance is costly. Use items such as sheets, towels, and dish towels as packing material. Utilize space by putting smaller items inside larger ones.

Do not pack anything in your air baggage or air freight that could be damaged by freezing or any liquids that are not absolutely escape-proof. Unpressurized and unheated compartments at high altitudes can cause things to freeze or the contents of bottles and tubes to be sucked outward by low air pressure. Screw-type plastic bottles packed inside leakproof plastic bags are best for transporting liquids.

*Do not pack flammable or explosive items, such as lighter fluid, matches, aerosol cans, nail polish, or polish remover in air cargo.*

## Unaccompanied Air Freight Allowance Chart

<u>Family</u>	<u>Gross Weight</u> (includes all packing material, containers, boxes)
<u>1st person</u>	250 pounds
<u>2nd person</u>	200 pounds
<u>3rd person</u>	150 pounds
<u>Each additional person</u>	100 pounds

**Suggested Items For Air Freight**

(See Chapter 15, “Children in the Foreign Service,” for suggestions on what to pack for children):

Linens, if you prefer not to use those from the welcome kit or if a welcome kit is not available

Pillows/pillowcases

CD player or stereo and CDs or tapes

TV/VCR (if not available to borrow or rent at post)

Microwave (not generally available—check with post)

Clothing—including for the next season, in case HHE is delayed

More hangers

Books, games

More photos, decorative items

Cosmetics and toiletries

Basic kitchen items, including small electric appliances, spices and condiments, and a cookbook or two

Seasonal decorations, gifts, etc., if likely to be needed before HHE arrives

Electrical supplies (see Chapter 10, “Electricity Abroad”)

Office supplies

More basic tools

Anything from the "Accompanied Air Baggage" list that didn't fit

**CONSUMABLES ALLOWANCE**

Over 90 Foreign Service posts allow the employee an additional weight allowance for consumable items. This allowance is meant to offset difficulties caused by the shortage or unavailability of certain foodstuffs, paper products, and other consumables at post.

Consumables are used up. They do not wear out. Thus, articles such as tires may not be shipped as consumables. Up to 2,500 pounds of consumables may be shipped for a two-year tour of duty. If the tour is extended by a year, an additional 1,250 pounds may be added.

Call the Transportation Regulations Office (202-647-2853) for additional information.

Visit or e-mail the Overseas Briefing Center ([FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov)) and review the briefing boxes for suggested items to purchase, which differ from post to post. The OBC also provides a list of suggested sources for making purchases. Bear in mind that availability at post changes.

Some suggestions when planning consumables purchases:

Be sure to get specific information, from more than one person if possible, about what is available (and affordable) at your particular post and what is not. To aid you in this, ask the Overseas Briefing Center ([FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov)) for post update forms and returnee referrals.

Before planning purchases, keep track of the items your household uses in a week (or, better yet, a month). Use this to determine amounts.

Check expiration dates. It is possible to lay in a two-year supply of some things (like shampoo), but impossible for other things (like crackers). Make sure food is not packed together with laundry detergent: it will end up smelling and tasting like soap!

Be sure to find out the rules on follow-up consumables orders. Some posts require personnel to order everything within the first year; at others, you can re-order later. Be sure to keep track of the shipment weight so you can use your remaining pounds.

## **FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION**

If you plan to ship firearms, read the post report to determine any restrictions or limitations in effect at your post. Arrange to have firearms registered with U.S. Customs before they are shipped from the United States (Customs Form 4457) as proof that you took the firearms from the United States. This will simplify reentry.

## **ITEMS NOT COVERED IN U.S. GOVERNMENT ALLOWANCES**

Boats, outboard motors, aircraft, animals, birds, and plants are not officially considered personal or household effects and may not be shipped or stored at U.S. Government expense. If you want to ship any of these items at your own expense, be sure to check the post report or contact the embassy of the country to which you are assigned to see if the item may be imported.

## **INSURANCE**

Throughout the moving process, your belongings are subjected to multiple handlings, stresses, and strains. Damage or loss can occur despite care taken in both packing and shipping. Therefore, the purchase of adequate private insurance is of particular importance.

Many employees assume that the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees' Claims Act of 1964 (6 FAM 300) provides full coverage against loss and/or damage to property. This is an erroneous assumption that needs to be clarified. *The Claims Act was never intended to provide full insurance.* Rather, it functions only as a minimal safety net in those instances where an employee has no private insurance or where private insurance is disallowed. (See Chapter 6, "Insurance," for more information.)

The Act authorizes payment for personal property only. It does not provide a remedy for consequential damages or other types of loss or incidental expenses such as loss of use, interest, carrying charges, cost of lodging or food while awaiting arrival of shipment, attorney fees, telephone calls, cost of transporting claimant or family members (car rentals), inconvenience and time spent in preparation of claim, or cost of insurance premiums.

A list of high-value items (more than \$1,000) should be filed with the Claims Office in the State Department. Thus, value and ownership will already have been established if there is need to file a claim against the U.S. Government. (See "Personal Inventory," above).

A "Personal Articles Floater Policy" can provide additional coverage for individual high-value items such as jewelry, silverware, and art objects. Professional appraisals may be required in some categories.

To file a claim against the U.S. Government, the employee needs to keep several points in mind. Within 75 days of receipt of the goods, the Claims Office must receive indication of intent to file a claim. The claim itself should be filed within one year of receipt of goods. If the employee waits longer than one year (and a maximum of two years), the amount that he or she receives may be reduced.

Forms needed to file the claim should be available from the General Services Officer (GSO) at post or on Infoforms (DS 1620-Claim for Personal Property; 1620A-Claims Investigating Officer's Report; 1620B-Demand on Carrier; 1620C-Schedule of Property; 1620E-Notice of Intent to File Claim for Loss and/or Damage). The Transportation Division is also finalizing EZ-Claims, which will permit the electronic filing of claims against the U.S. Government.

## **NOTE TO NEW EMPLOYEES**

As you prepare to come to Washington, you will probably not know your overseas destination. You can facilitate your subsequent move abroad if you carefully follow the packing suggestions in this section, taking special care to:

- Prepare a complete inventory of your household and personal goods;
- Plan what you might take abroad if authorized a *limited shipment of effects* (the shipment you get if traveling to a furnished post) and see that these items are packed separately from those that would remain in storage.

As the packers fill out their inventory sheets, be certain that you can identify cartons and items by the number placed on each piece. It might be useful to keep a small notebook and enter the packer's number with a brief notation of carton contents or description of individual items. When you receive your assignment you can easily notify the storage company or the department warehouse regarding the effects you wish shipped abroad.

## **TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS** **State Department (A/LM/OPS/TTM/TO)**

### **Operations**

Room 1248, Main State

(202) 647-4140 or (800) 424-2947  
*Chief of Operations*  
(202) 647-0209  
*Chief of Transportation Advisory Section*  
(202) 647-2988  
*Team Leaders:* (Always available on “800” number)  
WHA – (202) 647-4135  
AF - (202) 647-4133  
EUR – (202) 647-4168  
NEA – (202) 647-4131  
EAP – (202) 647-4131

**Regulations**

Room 1054, Main State  
(202) 647-2853

**Personal Property Claims (A/LM/OPS/TTM/CL)**

Room 1245, Main State  
(202) 736-7648  
Fax: (202) 647-2800

**AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (AID)**

**Operations and Claims (M/AS/TT)**

Room 4.8A  
Ronald Reagan Building  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20523  
Tel: (202) 712-1985

**OVERSEAS BRIEFING CENTER**

**The Transition Center**

Room E-2126  
4000 Arlington Boulevard  
Arlington, VA  
Tel: (703) 302-7277  
E-mail: [FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov](mailto:FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov)

**SAMPLE**  
**JOINT PROPERTY STATEMENT**

We declare that the property being stored at government expense is the joint property of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and either party may have access to these effects.

1. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of storage company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date entered into storage: \_\_\_\_\_

Invoice No. \_\_\_\_\_

Notarized by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_